

Blessed To Be A Blessing Matthew 6:25-33

A Pledge Sunday

As you know today is pledge Sunday, one of the most exciting days of the year. I know fully well how a sermon on pledging is viewed by people in the pews. I am not going to ask you to give more money to the church, so don't worry. But I am going to ask you to give your whole selves to Christ. We are United Methodists and most of you are professing members of a United Methodist church. We profess our faith in God and our desire to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. In our profession of faith, we make a vow to faithfully participate in the life and ministries of our Asbury UMC through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Do you remember it? Today, I am not asking you to do something new, but to remember your baptismal covenant and the profession of faith you made when you joined Asbury UMC. More importantly, today, I want you to remember how blessed we are and how God has loved us.

A Corn Maze

Last Sunday, the children and youth groups of Asbury, Zion and Haven UMC churches went to a corn maze. Billy, Ben and Eva were there. It was my first time to visit a corn maze so I thought it would be easy to go through. However, the maze was much more complex than I expected. In the middle of the maze, we lost where we were, so we walked around in circles over and over again. Billy and a Zion church member worked together to figure out where we were and we slowly found our way out.

While the two fathers were busy figuring out the right way, do you know what Ben and Eva and the other kids were doing? They were excited about going into the maze and went wherever they wanted to go. They kept running and chatting with one another. They didn't even look at the map but just said, "this way... oh... maybe that way..." If they met a dead end, they smiled and said, "we should go another way." They didn't care so much about finding the right way. They didn't worry about getting out. Why? Because their fathers were behind them. They seemed to enjoy the maze itself. After about an hour, the youngest one, 5 years old, from Zion got tired and came to her father and whispered in his ear. She wanted her father to carry her on his back. Of course, her father picked her up and walked with her until she wanted to run through the maze again. Even though these kids didn't know where to go or how long they would walk, they could enjoy the maze because they knew that their fathers were with them. Because they trusted them, the time in the maze became a joyful playtime.

As I prepared today's sermon, I couldn't let go of the image of that father carrying his child in the maze. We often feel that our life is like a maze. We are in the middle of a maze, a very complicated one. As we try to find a way forward, we encounter many twists and turns. Sometimes, we don't know where to go at an intersection. Sometimes, we come to a dead end. Sometimes, we feel like we are trapped in an inescapable maze and complain to God. But if we honestly reflect on our life journey so far, we confess that we have made it this far because our God has always been with us. Just as Billy walked behind Eva and Ben when they ran in circles around the maze, God always walks with us on our life-journey. Because our heavenly father loves us and care for us, we are able to continue this journey and enjoy it.

God' providential care for us

Today's scripture beautifully describes God's love and providential care for us. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"

Jesus reminds us that our God loves us and cares for us and invites us, not to worry about life but strive first for the kingdom of God. The issue here is whether we can trust God or not. If we trust God, our maze of life can be a joyful playtime just like Eva and Ben's enjoyment of the corn maze because they trusted Billy! In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." We are children of God so trust our generous God like little children trust their father and enjoy the maze of life.

The Life Maze

Trusting God is the precondition to enjoying the life maze, but there is a way to enjoy it even more. When I went to the corn maze last Sunday, the parking lot was full. People came for the corn maze, but everyone in the maze was not alone, but in a group. From toddlers to older adults, people of diverse ages walked together and laughed together while they got lost in the maze. I enjoyed my first experience of the corn maze, but I would not go back if I had to go alone. Even if the farm sends me a free ticket, I would not go back. Some have said, "so long as we have a good companion, no journey lasts too long." But without a good companion, without laughter, we may not enjoy the maze of life, even though we are able to find a way forward.

Jesus Christ walks with us in our life maze, but we also have other good companions. Do you know who they are? Look around you. Those beside you and behind you and in front of you... they are good companions in the life maze. We, Asbury family are on the same spiritual journey and this is a blessing. I have served several churches and have many clergy friends. Not all churches are like Asbury UMC. I can tell Asbury UMC is a good companion for the journey.

David Dorsey, Deb Rose, and Lee Arnold have shared why they support Asbury UMC. What they shared was not about money, but about you. All of them talked about what good companions you have been and how encouraging and uplifting you are on our journey together. No one is perfect but we can still share and be a perfect gift for one another.

Last Sunday, the Asbury family gave me a present because it was Pastor Appreciation Day. Diane knows I love hiking and gave me a hiking trail book of Rhode Island. Actually, that book was the same book she gave me when I first got here. So I will try to walk all those trails twice. It was a perfect gift for me because I felt that you know who I am and care for your pastor. I am really blessed to serve the Asbury family. Perhaps, when the pandemic is over, I can have a pastor's appreciation day for the congregation! What do you think? God has blessed us and our journey together. Can I get an 'Amen!'

We Are Blessed To Be A Blessing

We are blessed not for our own benefit. We are blessed to be a blessing for others. Someone in the maze might get lost and not know where to go. Someone might lose their group and be lonely and tired. Thriving in the kingdom of God means sharing the good news with

others. Telling them that our heavenly Father still walks with them and we also walk with them. Thriving the kingdom of God means sharing what we have with our neighbors. We can do this because we have already experienced how great and how generous our God is!

I can tell we, Asbury family, have been a blessing for others. When the pandemic started, we tried to find ways to serve our neighbors. So, we did online fund-raising, a little library on the street, we continued to collect food and recently 160 pair of shoes for those in need. Yesterday, we did the first “Food for Soul” food distribution and it was great. I would like to thank all of you for being a wonderful blessing for our neighbors. I also would like to encourage you to keep up your good work by supporting Asbury UMC and our neighbors!